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Memories Of Selwyn House School: 1946-1954

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Before Selwyn House School I spent two years at a kindergarten over the YMCA on the north side of Sherbrooke Street opposite Westmount Park. I was there from age three to age five. The school was run by a middle-aged woman named Miss Buttonshaw. I remember some details of my time there but since Miss Buttonshaw's school seems unlikely to hold a reunion, there's not much point in recording the facts here. Ed Chandler went to the same kindergarten and came with me to SHS.

Had we lived in Westmount, I might well have attended public school, but we were in Haddon Hall Apartments on the "wrong" side of Atwater. My parents considered the appropriate public school, Victoria, but it stood in seedy surroundings beside a multi-level stable belonging to one of the Montreal dairies. The aroma was pungent and pervasive. My parents wouldn't allow their child to subject himself to such plague-ridden possibilities. If the above reason for choosing SHS sounds snobbish, remember that in the 1940s, polio and other childhood diseases were real fears. I was an only child who came late into my parents' lives. My mother had a rather pampered upbringing as an only child in Toronto; my father was one of a family of thirteen (only ten of whom reached adulthood) raised in Seven Dials, a poor area in the east end of London, England. Both had reasons for wanting me to get a good education in the cleaner air of Redpath Street.

My admissions interview–although I doubt it had such a formal name–was on a dark, wet afternoon–half rain, half snow. My mother phoned the school from the basement of the Art Gallery and we walked right up the street to talk to Mr. Speirs. I don't recall the interview itself, but I remember seeing the rink swarming with large, dark figures as we walked up to the front door.

The entrance test was on a sunny day in the room that would become my first classroom, the room on the ground floor at the southwest corner of the house. This room was the brightest in the house as its southern wall was a tall, multi-paned window (protected by an iron mesh) that looked out on a Horse Chestnut Tree whose "conkers" and leaf stems were a source of games every fall.

The test was administered by Miss Afra Snead. The women teachers at the school had wonderful names: Snead, Locke, Tester and Markland. They sound as if they come from a Victorian novel.

Miss Buttonshaw had trained me well. I did the arithmetic with no trouble. The final question was a request to write the alphabet. I knew the whole twenty-six letters, but Miss Buttonshaw had not succeeded in curing me of the habit of drifting off to dreamland. I got as far as 'D', stared out the window and was shocked to have my paper twitched away from me without apparent warning. I mustn't be too hard on Miss Buttonshaw. A generation of teachers and my wife have not cured me of living large portions of my life in an alternate universe.

C Form: 1946-47

Miss Snead was our Form Teacher and taught us arithmetic. She was a tiny, cylindrical, grey-haired lady–very English. She came from Hastings and when she retired she returned there. Before class began each morning she and Mrs. Tester or Mrs. Markland had a chat through the

pocket doors that connected our room to the larger classroom at the front of the house. We sat quietly and waited, not because we were patient, but because we knew, even at five years old, that the longer they talked, the shorter the lessons would be.

In the early part of the year Miss Snead kept telling us that if we were good and learned our lessons well we could do something she called "tables." Hoping for something in the carpentry line I did my best. The reality of multiplication was a great disappointment. We had to stand beside our seats and chant the tables in unison while Miss Snead walked up and down the aisles making sure we spoke out loud and clear. I quickly grew lazy, and while she was on the far side of the room I simply opened and shut my mouth. I *still* have trouble with multiplication. It was my father, who was an actuary, who finally sat me down and showed me the relationships that made numbers so easy for him. For example, it was he, not one of the SHS teachers, who showed me how the nine times table works, the numeral in the units column decreasing by one each time the numeral in the tens column increases by one.

I may have thought that I was too inconspicuous in my laziness to be caught drifting, but part way through the year I was put out in the dark hall to contemplate my sins. One of the older male teachers passed by, knocked on the door and asked Miss Snead if she would like him to take me to Mr. Speirs. I was marched upstairs. After a wait I was called in; I stood on the carpet in front of the desk. What had started as just another day was descending into realms of unimagined horror. I was trying not to tremble and not to cry. Looking back I realize that Mr. Speirs hadn't a clue why I was there. The exact words have long fluttered away but I remember the essence of the interview.

"What have you done?"

"I guess I haven't been working."

"What do you plan to do about it?"

"I'll work harder and harder and get better and better until I'm excellent."

I remember that last line because it made Mr. Speirs smile. The interview was over. Relief flooded over me. Weak at the knees, I had trouble getting back downstairs to class.

Mr. Howis taught us Geography and probably History. On one Geography test we were asked to draw a cape. I drew a picture of the only cape that came to mind, my mother in a rain cape. Mr. Howis called me up to the front of the class and asked me if I was trying to be funny. He slashed a red line through my careful drawing. I was humiliated and completely tongue-tied. I remember getting a ruler across the palm of the hand but I'm not sure if that was the occasion. In History as in Geography we learned British material. Canada was not on the curriculum. I knew about the Weald and the Cotswolds long before I knew the names of the provinces of Canada. We memorized the names of the Kings and Queens of England according to an old rhyme that began, "Willie, Willie, Harry, Stee. . . ." Those first four names are all that remain in my head.

When he was on duty outside, "Pop" Howis used to join the boys in trying to catch leaves as they fluttered down from the trees.

Periodic assemblies were held in the church hall at the foot of Redpath Street. C and D Forms didn't go to those. One morning Tony Maxwell's father was the guest speaker, so naturally Tony was allowed to go to hear him.

There was no art, music, science or gym. The all-purpose gymnasium/lunch-hall/assembly room/theatre was being built behind the school that year. There was a general choir and a highly selective one and an ambitious drama program. Either this year or the next the school performed *The Merchant of Venice* (abridged) at the Montreal Repertory Theatre on Guy Street just south of Sherbrooke. I have no recollection of being on stage in the general choir but I remember the

chaos backstage. The school also performed *The Monkey's Paw* in the previously mentioned church hall. Anson McKim played one of the leads. The play scared the daylights out of me.

At lunch one of the teachers criticized me for not holding my knife and fork in the approved manner.

Looking back, I wonder at the rigour of those early years. Remember, I was five years old.

Twice a week we were taken up Côte des Neiges in long black cabs each with an extra set of folding seats. We climbed stone steps and followed a path through the woods to a pair of fields above Beaver Pond where we played soccer. We may have changed our shoes, but not our clothes; there were no locker rooms. Nobody coached us. In those pre-TV days I had never seen a game of any sport. Two of the larger boys picked teams. I was one of the last picked. A whistle blew and we were expected to play. At one point I found myself in the middle of a group of pushing, struggling boys surrounding a ball. It came to my feet. I hadn't a clue what to do with it. I must have kicked it the wrong way because I remember the angry shouts. Just as I was sorting things out, the whistle blew for half time. Something called "changing ends" took place. Once again I was totally lost. I looked longingly at Beaver Pond where my Dad had taken me for Sunday walks. I was in another world and I didn't like it much.

In winter we had the school rink. On one occasion because I wasn't a very good skater I was put in goal. Snow was falling. I watched the puck slide past me leaving a dark smear on the ice. Someone said a goal had been scored. I was sure the puck had missed the net.

In spring we returned to the Mountain to play softball.

Bullying comes in many forms. I was the youngest in my form and naturally shy and diffident. No one beat me up but as I hung about on the fringes of groups not knowing how to join, I was a natural target. I dreaded recess. One incident involved my footwear. I had rubber boots; everyone else had galoshes with buckles. A group, led by Beau Quinlan, laughed at me and pushed me around. As I write the words the incident seems trivial from an adult point of view but the misery was overwhelming. If I said anything at home, the response was some version of, "Be a man." Other than making sure I never cried, I wasn't sure how to put the advice into action.

Random events outside the classroom

This is as good a time as any to remember some of the rituals that took place out of school. In the summer my mother and I visited two shops every year. One was Howarth's or Howard's on the south side of Saint Catherine's Street east of Guy opposite the Church of Saint James the Apostle. This store specialized in the blazers and other accoutrements of Independent Schools. Large crests decorated the walls above the clothes racks. I was always a little disappointed that the SHS crest was not as elaborate as some of the others. Two colours and a single animal, however rampant, seemed somehow inadequate. Incidentally, no one told me the animal was a gryphon (is it?). I always assumed it was a lion.

One item of clothing I never liked was the herringbone breeches that buttoned just below the knee. Heavy wool socks were supposed to be pulled up over the buttons and held in place with elastic garters. The trouble was that rough play always collapsed the socks and the multiple buttons became caked with mud. Taking the breeches off was messy and troublesome. Fortunately, like the button fly, breeches were on the way out and soon the school wardrobe was reduced to grey flannel trousers for cold weather and grey flannel shorts for warm days. Pants were held up by an elastic black and yellow belt with an S-shaped hasp that looked like a snake.

The second store was a shoe shop on the north side of Saint Catherine's just west of Green Avenue. "There's a lot of you turned up for feet," my mother said. This store was fun to visit. It was narrow and dark and the shelves climbed all the way to the ceiling. Ladders hanging on rails gave access to the top shelves. I always wanted to climb one of them and go for a ride, but I knew there was no point in asking.

My first day at SHS was one of those days when the skies opened and the rain fell in straight lines all day. I walked close to my father to stay under his umbrella. I don't recall being nervous but I remember how dark the day was and how the sidewalks glistened.

The walk to and from school was a part of the day I always enjoyed. If the temperature was over 40° Fahrenheit I was allowed to wear shorts. On Wednesdays I wore my cub uniform. Dad worked for the Prudential of England down in the financial district. From his youth he had always been a great walker so he usually walked to work and for the first few years we went together along Sherbrooke Street until I turned up Simpson or, after that entrance to the school was closed because of complaints from the neighbours, Redpath. I never took the bus.

On the north side of the street behind a high stone wall the large wooded church property climbed the hill. I walked along the south side past Somerset Apartments. Sometimes I saw Robin Pitcher, the only other student who walked from my side of the city. He had much farther to come, from the other side of Green Avenue. He took the north side of Sherbrooke and there was too much traffic for me to cross before Guy. When I began my years at SHS the block on the other side of the Somerset Apartments was vacant. It was used as summer storage for the red, horse-drawn snowplows that cleared the sidewalks until they were replaced by grey motorized ploughs. Four office buildings grew on this property during my time at SHS so there was often something exciting to watch on my way home from school. Next came the Masonic Temple. A Great Dane lived in the first boarding house past the temple. He was often sprawled across the sidewalk in the morning. I always stopped and passed the time with him. Brian Vintcent lived in the apartment on the south west corner of Sherbrooke and Guy until his mother married again and they moved to a big house up the hill in Westmount. Michael Huband lived in the square block at the corner of Simpson and Sherbrooke (Linton Apartments?).

As long as Simpson Street was open to us I had a variety of routes from which to choose. There was a lane that led up the hill directly to the back gate of the school. On my way home I could walk along a nicely treed cul de sac to Côte des Neiges. Some of the boys caught a northbound streetcar at this point. I waited with them then walked down to Sherbrooke and home. A basement apartment by the streetcar stop had a "to let" sign in the window. I thought it said "toilet" until I looked a second time. Apartment buildings were being constructed between Simpson and Côte des Neiges. The sites provided another opportunity for spectating and exploring.

During my first year at SHS I wasn't allowed to cross Guy and Sherbrooke alone. My mother would wait for me at the corner and accompany me from there. I insisted that she remain hidden. I was having enough trouble without being labeled a "Mommy's boy." She was a good sport about this. Two incidents occurred because of her rule. One morning my mother was walking me to school instead of my father. We crossed as far as the narrow island in the middle of Côte des Neiges where the southbound streetcars stopped. The road was under repair. The streetcar must have started forward because Mom pulled me back and we both fell into a deep hole in the pavement. I fell onto a workman who was bending over at the bottom so I wasn't hurt. Mom managed to grasp at the edges of the hole as she went down so that she wouldn't fall on top of me. I remember looking up rather dazed and seeing Mom silhouetted against the sky

holding on for dear life. We were lucky. Mom scraped her elbows and her knees and probably strained some muscles. I must have bounced. To recuperate we went back and called in on Mrs. Evans, the wife of the Dean of Montreal, a friend of my parents. The Evans family lived in the house beside the Bank of Montreal, the building on the corner. Mom was badly shaken but later in the day her chief complaint was the loss of a pair of stockings. She threatened to write to the MTC demanding payment for them, but I doubt the letter was ever written. I missed a day of school, so I felt no pain at all.

The second incident led to my being allowed to come home on my own. One afternoon I stood in a snowstorm for over an hour on the corner of Côte des Neiges and Sherbrooke waiting for Mom to see me across. She had forgotten. She was quite cross with me for just standing there, but I had been instructed not to cross the street on my own and didn't dare disobey. I kept thinking she would be along in a minute or two. I had no money for a phone–and I'm not sure if I knew how to use a pay phone anyway. Had I gone back to school and asked them to phone home Mom might have come while I was away. If this happened I knew there would be dire consequences. Mom would come . . . eventually. The faith of children is absolute.

Early spring was the best time for walking down Redpath Street. Melting snow made channels at the edge of the road. Before we grew too old to find such activities acceptable we built dams to make lakes that eventually burst their confines and carried miniature icebergs down the hill. On the days when I was delayed by these hydraulic pursuits I usually came home with my trousers wet half way to my knees. Heavy grey flannel takes a long time to dry.

East of Guy on the south side of Sherbrooke Street were some exciting shop windows. I liked an art gallery that often had Montague Dawson paintings of clipper ships in the window. At some time during my years at SHS a store called The Trainatorium opened next to the medical arts building on the corner. I don't think I ever bought anything there, but I spent hours in the store salivating as the trains went round and round their displays. Tony Maxwell took the bus home, but sometimes he would accompany me at least this far.

I went to a doctor in the same medical arts building after school for allergy shots. At peak times I had as many as two in each arm twice a week. That may sound scary but coward though I may have been in some ways, injections didn't bother me. A visit to the doctor was a leisurely affair in those days. There never seemed to be anyone else in the waiting room. After my shots (or between them) I sat at the doctor's desk holding a piece of cotton wool over the points of entry and stared out his window up Côte des Neiges watching the traffic perform its dance in the sunshine. At some point I moved from my pediatrician to this doctor for a check-up. When he came into the examining room I was, of course, standing there naked. He looked me up and down and said, "You're a tall thin glass of milk." It was a pretty accurate description.

When my adult teeth came in, one of my front teeth, for reasons too complicated to explain here, came in at right angles to the others. My lips wouldn't close and I could fit a straw between my two front teeth. Like many Selwyn House boys I went down Drummond Street to a Dr. Franklin for bands. Appointments were usually at 8:00 a.m. and lasted an hour. For several years my routine journey to school included a monthly early walk to the dentist and a late appearance at school. My arrival in class always caused a disturbance. Everyone wanted to look at the metal Maginot Line in my mouth to see what enhancements had been added. Dr. Franklin did a good job. The one tooth is still slightly crooked, but after several years and about $1,000 of 1950 after-tax money, my parents and I decided enough was enough.

Mrs. Warren, a pleasant older woman who was the school's first librarian, lived in the Somerset Apartments. In my final years at the school I often stayed in the library "helping" until it closed. Once or twice we walked home together.

One summer I found a copy of a magazine called *Photoplay* in a pile of magazines at the back of my grandmother's apartment building in Toronto. It was pretty tame stuff by today's standards but the glamorous pictures of movie stars tickled my fancy. *Popular Science* was no longer enough. I felt instinctively that I needed to buy my illicit copy off the beaten track and hide the magazine from my parents. Several times on my way home in the dark I trudged through the snow to the foot of Saint Matthew at Saint Catherine's to buy a copy at the newsstand that made a bright island in the middle of the sidewalk. The guilt and secrecy were a large part of the fun. Eventually my mother found my stash. To my surprise she wasn't shocked. In fact, one day when I was sick, she brought the current issue home for me to read. It had a picture of Janet Leigh on the cover. As she tossed the magazine on the bed Mom said, "Poor girl. She's got T.B." Puzzled, I stared at her. A movie star with tuberculosis? "Two beauts," she said. Mom always had the ability to surprise me.

Speaking of sickness, it's time I made a confession. I enjoyed school, but during my final years at SHS occasionally I felt the need for what nowadays would be called a little R and R. About once a year I told my parents I felt really sick. The acid test, I knew, was my temperature. Unless my temperature was over 100° F. I wasn't deemed sick enough to take the day off. The thermometer was fetched, shaken down and placed under my tongue where I was told to keep it for two minutes. At that point the parent in question usually made the mistake of leaving the room. That gave me two minutes to get the mercury to a good level–not high enough to warrant calling the doctor, but high enough to keep me in bed with my favourite books for the day. I held the thermometer beside the light bulb. It instantly registered some ridiculous figure that I knew would not be believed. The trick was to get it down to about 101° and to have a woebegone expression with the instrument in my mouth before anyone came back into the room. By evening, miraculously, I always recovered, but that was fine; one day was enough. I returned to school refreshed.

B Form: 1947-48

In our second year we moved into what had been the dining room next to the stairs on the north side of the school. Mr. Harrison was our form teacher. He was young, tall and enthusiastic, but I don't remember what subject he taught.

Miss Snead still taught us arithmetic and pulled an excellent April Fool joke on us. We were learning short division. She gave us a test consisting of several examples. We laboured through them. After she had collected the papers she asked us if we had noticed anything unusual about the test. Rodney Tait, who was new that year, was the only one of us who spotted that all the examples were exactly the same. When I got the test back I felt like an idiot; like most of the class I had calculated some right and some wrong. The only explanation I can offer for our collective lack of observation is Miss Snead's reputation for severity; we never would have suspected her of pulling a prank with something as deadly serious as an arithmetic test.

We must have been restless just before lunch. One of our teachers said it was because the room had been the dining room for so long.

I think Mr. Perkins taught us Geography. On the first day of school when he went through the register, he was sure my name should have an "s" on the end. I had trouble convincing him

that I was just Pedoe. When I told my parents at dinner that night they were quite scornful. "Just because his name ends in "s" he thinks everyone's name should." The Geography book was an exciting one. Each chapter made a story out of the experiences of a boy in a different culture. One was about nomadic pygmies in Africa. It was a real eye-opener to find out that there were whole races of good people in the world who looked and lived so differently.

Mr. Perkins was also in charge of Wolf Cubs. The youngest age at which we could join was seven. Not for the first time I felt disadvantaged by being the youngest in the class. Half a year of waiting seemed an eternity. When I was finally allowed to join I loved Cubs. The darkened gymnasium, the circle of crouching boys in uniform, the "campfire" made of tissue paper and a lightbulb, the *Jungle Book* connection, the oath, the handshake, the salute, the shouts of, "Dib, dib, dib, dib, dob, dob, dob, dob, A-ke-la, we'll do our best!" It was heady stuff. Over next few years every Wednesday afternoon we learned knots, worked on badges for our sleeves and stars for our caps and played games. Two games that made an impression were Kim's Game and British Bulldogs. I'm surprised no one was hurt playing the latter. It involved everyone lining up along one side of the gym. One boy was selected to stand in the middle of the floor. When Akela (Mr. Perkins) blew the whistle we all charged to the other side. The boy in the middle attempted to catch someone. That made two boys in the middle for the next charge. And so on. At the end only one boy was left at the wall with a ravening horde in the middle waiting to catch him. The game was not played gently and we loved it.

Boxing must have been compulsory at some point; I certainly wouldn't have volunteered. We had some practice bouts in Cubs the afternoon before the school competition. I was drawn against Jim Evans. He battered me about quite handily. When the lists went up the next day, to my horror I found I was set to fight him again in the actual competition. Within a few seconds of the start of the match he landed a solid haymaker on the side of my head. I went down. I kept my eyes shut and listened to the count. I stayed down. Jim received a hero's praise for his knockout and I was seen as being outside the pale. I may not have been delighted with the result, but I didn't have to be anyone's punching bag for the rest of the day. I was satisfied.

I don't know what the offence was, but at some time during the year Mr. Harrison caned Brian Vintcent and me. He took us up to the staff rooms on the second floor. He took me in first. Coat tails up. Two whacks on the backside. As I passed Brian on the way out I tried to give him some comfort; we were both in tears. "It doesn't hurt too much," I said. Mr. Harrison must have heard me because the next year when I received my first caning from Mr. Speirs, he said, "Maybe this will hurt."

Mr. Phillips ran the two choirs, one for those who could really sing and one for the rest of us. I remember standing in one of the back rows on the new stage staring into the lights while six or seven of the elite sang the beautiful air, "Who is Sylvia?" I have to say that one of my lasting impressions of the Selwyn House of my era was its elitism. When I went to UCC I don't think I worked harder, became smarter or gained in co-ordination, nor did the standard drop. If anything, UCC was even more competitive. But suddenly I could make teams, win my "colours", sing in choirs and win prizes. It might be fair comment to say that what I learned at SHS helped me to do well at Upper Canada; but I think there are better and less painful ways of teaching than exclusion. I hope the present school gives more opportunities for the less talented to feel their worth.

At Prizegiving that spring, Mr. Harrison held me aside and had me sit beside him at the end of the row. My parents said I should take the action as a compliment. At the time I accepted their version.

A Form: 1948-49
Form 1: 1949-50

I have trouble separating A Form and Form 1 as we spent both years in the same classroom, the large, bright room on the ground floor at the southeast corner of the building. Sections of the elaborate cornice remained around the tops of the walls. An elaborate plaster boss decorated the middle of the ceiling and the marble fireplace remained on what was, for us, the side wall. A roll-up map of Canada appeared. I presume this was a sponsored item as each corner was decorated with a larger-than-life chocolate bar–Neilson's, I think. I wonder how many children grew up thinking that these were real and desirable geographical features.

The following memories could apply to either of the years.

The desks were venerable double forms deeply scarred by previous incumbents and attached to the row in front and/or the row behind. At the beginning of the year I shared a desk with Deane Nesbitt because we were together alphabetically. We weren't together long. We were warned not to encroach on a neighbour's space. I took this literally and got into trouble for using my ruler to try to saw Deane's eraser in half because it strayed onto my half of the desk. I was moved closer to the front of the room.

Mr. Howis taught us *Treasure Island*. Someone taught us *The Wind in the Willows*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Kidnapped*. These were easy days in English; I had read most of the books but probably did far worse than I should have because I assumed I didn't need to read them again. It wasn't until I reached university that I understood the huge gap between reading for pleasure and reading for an examination. Mr. Howis gave us what he called spelling bees. We lined up, equal numbers on each side of the room. If we got a word wrong we had to sit down. The excitement mounted as the teams shrank. I don't think I ever won, but the exercise was a good one because even those of us who sat down early had a feeling of ownership in the members of the team who were left. Michael Huband and Charlie Chaffey were the two top boys in the class; I imagine they usually won.

Mr. Phillips taught us French. Our reading book followed the wanderings of an adult and a boy around France. Why they were wandering or what was their destination I have no idea. All I remember is the joke from our vocabulary one day. Mr. Phillips turned *le lendemain* into "the laundryman" and the joke, with variations, carried on for some days. He also gave us a code for putting our hands up–right hand for one thing, left for another. Two hands was the emergency signal that we needed to go to the toilet. I'm not sure if he intended the code to be serious or if he was just responding to our too frequent requests.

We started Latin. The book was a thin, pale blue primer titled *Ritchie's First Steps in Latin*. We all modified our covers to read *Ritchie's First Steps in Eating* and thought this delightfully clever. Every few lessons there was a page of sentences to translate titled "Recapitulatory Exercise." The heading baffled me. Otherwise the book was a model of clarity. I came to like Latin but I don't hold with the view that Latin is necessary for the appreciation of English. Those whose English is too Latinate are usually heavy-handed and dull in their writing. Which would you rather have, a hearty welcome or a cordial reception? Both phrases mean the same. Most people think a hearty welcome sounds nicer. They're choosing Anglo-Saxon over Latin. The importance of Latin as a school subject is more general; it teaches the structure of language. I don't regret the eight or nine years I studied the subject.

Mrs. Markland taught us arithmetic. She was strong and a clear communicator. She introduced us to fractions with a well-conceived lesson involving the cutting of a birthday cake. I

understood the relationships instantly. We still used the English system of measurement and had to learn tables of how many yards in a rod and how many rods in a furlong etc., etc. In some level of hell I'm sure delinquent accountants are chained to desks doing endless problems in this system.

Mr. Mayer or Maier taught us English at some point. He told us about a book that he said was better than *Alice*. I went to him after class and asked him about it. He lent me his copy of *Mistress Masham's Repose* and later, *The Sword in the Stone*, both by T. H. White. Many years later I read both novels to my children. They're as good as told me they were. Mr. Mayer was a talented man. He directed the first plays performed on the makeshift stage in the new gym. We were to do a play about China called *Lady Precious Stream*. Part way through rehearsals there turned out to be a problem with copyright. A day or two later he delivered to us a typed copy of a one-act adaptation he had written of the trial scene from *Pickwick Papers*. When I came to read the novel, Dickens' trial was something of a disappointment. Mr. Mayer's version was *much* funnier.

Milk was an available "extra" for those of us whose parents paid the surcharge–and I think most did. Dozens of half-pint glass bottles of full cream milk were placed on trays on the radiator-tops in the entrance hall of the school. We drank our bottles quickly at the start of recess so that we could get out to play. How long the milk sat there on the radiators I don't know. To this day the smell of milk on the turn takes me back to the dark hallway, milling bodies and gurgling straws in a dim sepia light.

We now had Gym with Mr. Perkins. This made a nice break in the day. We did exercises in unison (I couldn't touch my toes then and I still can't) and somersaults and similar movements on the mats. One day we were told to do some kind of dive and roll. When it came to my turn I landed on my head instead of tucking and rolling. Dizzy, disoriented and gasping for breath I staggered to one of the luncheon tables that spent their days pushed up against the walls of the gym and dragged myself onto it. No one seemed to notice. When the room retuned to stability I dried my eyes and returned to my place.

As I write this I find myself shaking my head at how attitudes to safety and liability have changed over the years. No one "spotted" boys performing various skills; no teaching of skills took place. Those who "could" just "did." The rest of us, the uncoordinated, struggled along. I'm not just referring to SHS. At Camp Arrowhead we didn't use lifejackets except as pillows (they were pink, bulky, not very buoyant and they stank); at UCC, where I boarded, I used to go unsupervised and alone into the gym on weekends and use the equipment, including a trampoline.

In "A" or "1" I was caned twice in fairly rapid succession. Beau Quinlan and I were pushing each other while we waited for the next teacher to appear. One of us pushed the other into a glass-fronted bookcase at the side of the room. A pane broke. I can still hear the crack and feel the numbing silence that followed. Beau and I were sent upstairs to Mr. Speirs. The second time I somehow contrived to rip the hem on McLernon's blazer. He was sitting on the form/bench in front of me. My feet were on the rail that separated us; his blazer hung over the rail. He tried to stand up. Whether I was deliberately trying to stop him from standing up or whether it was a total accident, I can't say. Later Mrs. Markland came into the room holding up the blazer.

"Who did this?" she asked.

I put up my hand.

Damage had been done; away I went. Again I had to bend over and place my hands on the couch in Mr. Speirs office. He took out a thin wand and, again, hit me twice. The only thing I

resented occurred when the school phoned my parents to tell them that McLernon's blazer would have to be paid for. I was punished a second time. Among other things, my accumulated allowance up to that point was confiscated. I had been brought up to tell the truth; before this episode I had never lied. The lesson I learned was that, whatever the school motto, I should use discretion in rationing the truth.

Caning wasn't the only physical punishment. Once in A Form or Form 1, Mr. Howis lined up a group of us facing the wall and walked down the line hitting each of us over the head with a textbook. On another occasion in French class I had turned around and was talking to the boy behind me. I was too absorbed to notice Mr. Phillips tiptoe up to me. He slapped me across the thigh hard enough to raise a red welt that lasted the rest of the day. I was wearing shorts. Teachers threw chalk, blackboard erasers and occasionally books at us when we were inattentive. One used to flick us behind the ear if we answered a question incorrectly.

Perhaps it's necessary to say something at this point about corporal punishment. I don't think it's surprising that I remember the episodes so clearly. Pain doesn't necessarily produce the desired result but it makes a lasting impression. The attitude at home and at school seemed to be, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." I could be inattentive and mischievous but I wasn't nasty, violent or rude. In fact I would describe myself as having been quieter than average, rather solitary and an avid reader. But I did seem to attract trouble. I was caned five times at SHS. There would have been no point in my complaining to my parents; I would simply have placed myself in double jeopardy. My father strapped me–and unlike the teachers he did not restrict himself to two cuts. Eventually I hid the belt he used. Fear and logic are not natural partners. I bore no resentment against the masters who caned me–I still feel none. Mr. Speirs, in particular, was simply doing his duty. When a boy was sent to him, usually by one of the women teachers, he was expected to cane him. He never seemed to derive any pleasure from the action; he never struck in anger (despite his comment on the first occasion). Two strokes were the school standard (six at UCC). Mr. Speirs was an inspirational teacher. When I came to have him for Scripture and then English, I looked forward to his classes. Thanks to him I know the stories of the Old Testament better than most people. The love that he gave me for literature and the written word is one of the two principal reasons why I eventually became an English teacher myself.

My punishments had at least one positive effect. For example, many years later when I was a teacher I came into my high school classroom at Crescent School to find the room unnaturally silent and the glass on one of my pictures broken. A rush of déjà vu engulfed me. I inquired as to the culprit–though boys' body language is all too easy to read. I took the picture off the wall, handed it to the boy and asked him to bring it back to me with the glass mended before the end of term. He returned it a week or two later. I thanked him. Nothing else was said. Nothing in my classroom was ever broken again. Perhaps child-rearing is too permissive in the twenty-first century; if so, it's a fault that may be excused. I think my generation should take some credit for being able to break the pattern of physical punishment that, in my experience at least, dominated our upbringing.

Form 2: 1950-51

For Form 2 we moved up to the heady environs of the third floor. The ceilings were lower and the windows smaller. We felt a real sense of seniority. After recess or lunch we stood in front of our lockers then walked in single file up the stairs. A prefect was stationed on each landing. If anyone pushed, poked, talked, stepped out of line or, God forbid, took two steps at

once, the prefect sent him to the bottom and he had to climb the flight again. The stairs creaked and our feet banged hollowly on the wooden treads. One hundred boys climbing the stairs (and perhaps banging a little harder than strictly necessary) made quite a noise. I have to admit that without the ritual and the discipline imposed, chaos would have resulted.

As I mentioned previously we had always sat on long forms that held two boys and were attached to the desktop of the row behind us. The desks were old and deeply scored with the initials of our predecessors to which we always added our own. In Form 2 we graduated to relatively new individual tablet arm desks with a big drawer under the seat for our books.

The year began with our being told of a near tragedy. Toby Rankin had accidentally struck Jim Evans in the head with a golf club as they waited to board the bus for camp. I don't know what the effect was on Toby, but Jim had a long and difficult recovery through the year.

Mr. Furze, an elderly man with wisps of white hair curling up from his bald head taught us Mathematics. His nickname was Fuzzy or Fuzzy-Wuzzy from the schoolboy rhyme:

Fuzzy-Wuzzy was a bear
But Fuzzy-Wuzzy had no hair
So Fuzzy-Wuzzy wasn't fuzzy,
Was he?

Mr. Furze was a schoolmaster of the old type, quiet and dreamy but firm. He taught us two procedures that I still use occasionally. One is the "Rule of Three." Like Miss Snead, he played a trick on us. After what seemed like months of examples of people building walls and digging ditches, he set us a problem that ran something like this: "If seven boys can eat lunch in thirty minutes, how long will fifty boys take?" We struggled away, working out how long one boy would take and then multiplying by fifty and laboriously changing the raw minutes into hours, minutes and seconds as we had been taught. The answer is, of course, thirty minutes. Fooled again!

The other concept was, I think, called "Divisibilities." These are the tricks for determining whether a multi-digit number is evenly divisible by another number. In pre-calculator days this knowledge was real time-saver. Quickly: Is 3,762 divisible by 9? Yes. The sum of its digits is 18. 18 is divisible by 9, therefore 3,762 is divisible by 9. All the single-digit numbers except 7 have rules; I remember the complete list, but won't punish readers whose patience has carried them this far.

We had stopped having handwriting as a subject, but our writing must have deteriorated because a woman was brought in to re-teach us the subject once a week. It was a lost cause. She started off badly by saying something like the following: "I come all the way from Beaconsfield. You wouldn't think your bad handwriting would be public knowledge that far away, but it is." We weren't that gullible. She didn't last the year.

In Geography we drew maps of all the continents. I enjoyed this. A new boy named Colin Dobell had the bright idea of just outlining each country with a colour instead of filling in the whole area. Several of us copied his style shamelessly. One day we were set the problem of finding certain places on the map of the world that hung at the front of the room. There were about twenty of us and *none* of us could find Kamchatka. One by one we went to the front of the class and searched. I dearly wanted to be the one who made the discovery, but like everyone else I had a fit of temporary blindness. Oh well. I know where it is now, and I'll never forget. (Incidentally, don't bother checking; it's not called Kamchatka any more.)

Mr. Speirs taught us Scripture once a week. We each had a massive illustrated copy of the Bible in modern English. We worked our way through it over two years. There was no emphasis

on belief or faith. We learned the stories and I enjoyed them. When later I became a serious student of literature I often had reason to be grateful for the knowledge I gained in these classes.

I'm afraid the most abiding memory of Second Form has nothing to do with academics. Part way through the year several us decided that carrying our book bags downstairs was just too onerous. We waited until the teacher's back was turned and then threw the bags out the window onto the gravel drive on the north side of the school. We were lucky on several counts. We never hit anybody. We didn't do any serious damage to our books. We didn't get caught and therefore we were never caned.

Form 3: 1951-52

For third form we moved across the hall. The room was smaller and our numbers dropped to about sixteen.

Two new teachers had arrived who, though different from each other, seemed to bring a new tone to the school. That they both had English accents was no surprise. The independent schools liked the tone that the right accent provided. Mr. Moodey stayed long enough to become a legend. I'm in no position to judge his intellect, but he seemed to all of us to be a brilliant mathematician and scientist. We noticed that he spent a great deal of time in the office talking to Mrs. Howis. On the lunch attendance slips sent to her he always drew a little picture. We observed and we giggled. The relationship undoubtedly was nothing more than a pleasant friendship. Still, when I heard from Charlie Chaffey many years later that, after the death of "Pop" Howis Mr. Moodey and Mrs. Howis had married, I was pleased and not in the least surprised. Mr. Moodey taught us Mathematics and Science (a new subject) in Form 3. No more basic arithmetic. It was as if we changed gears. We learned from the venerable old texts that had been imposed on students for a generation. The Algebra text was by Hall and Knight. The Geometry text, based on Euclid, was of similar bulk and desiccation. The letter "x" became an important part of our lives, as did words like equation, quadratic, hypothesis, congruent, theorem, corollary and *quod erat demonstrandum* (QED). Oddly enough I found geometry easy and continued to enjoy it until I reached a certain teacher at UCC in grade 13. But that's another story.

We learned how to calculate compound interest. The incremental calculations went on year by year for pages. Remember, we had no calculators, and no computer programs. Surely this is one place where I'm entitled to say, "You have no idea how easy your life is. Why, back when I was a boy. . . ."

One day Brainerd brought a slide rule to class thinking it was just a fancy ruler. Mr. Moodey was scathing in his comments, took it from him (I hope not permanently) and spent most of the class explaining its operation to Charlie Chaffey. Mr. Moodey was a good and effective teacher with a dry wit but he was guilty of that common sin in teachers, catering to and enjoying the smartest students.

Science was new to us and to the school. A lab had been built off the landing between the first and second floors. It was an exciting place. One of the first things we were able to do was to make thermometers out of glass tubes by heating the glass over a Bunsen burner, blowing a bulb at one end of the tube, partially filling the tube with coloured water and sealing it with more heat. Our results were mixed and mine broke in my schoolbag on the way home, but there was no question that the process was exciting. Mr. Moodey gave us a piece of advice that I have passed on to my own children and emphasized until they recite it with me when they hear me begin.

"Remember, when things are heated they get hot." I don't know how many times I've forgotten that valuable lesson only to remember Mr. Moodey as the blister rises on my finger.

In the lab were other exciting things like weigh scales in glass cases, racks of test tubes and a bell jar. Until now we had never had the experience of anything but book learning. The lab was an Ali Baba's cave of delights. We used something called a calorimeter to determine the boiling point of water. And, yes, it was 100° C., more or less. At least I think that was the purpose of the experiment. We separated water into hydrogen and oxygen using electricity. And, yes, there was twice as much hydrogen as oxygen. We distilled the alcohol out of a mixture of alcohol and water using a delightfully complex system of tubes and hoses. We found out why ice floats and that tepid water can boil when the air pressure is lowered. We generated electricity by rubbing an ebony rod with cat's fur. But the experiment that was the most fun was determining the magnetic field of various shapes of magnet by sprinkling iron filings on a piece of paper above them. David Terroux had a small magnet with him. We moved him as close as possible to Mr. Moodey's demonstration. He put his hand with the magnet in it on the counter beside the paper. Sure enough, the iron filings misbehaved. We were delighted. However, we had underestimated our opponent. It didn't take Mr. Moodey long to follow the filings to Terroux's hand. I don't remember the punishment. Mr. Moodey wasn't a caner. With his wit and intellect he didn't need to be. I think we were sent back to the classroom and wrote lines or some sort of imposition, as they were called, until we realized that being in the lab and behaving was more fun than writing in the classroom.

Even the fact that we had to write up our calculations and procedures in a lab book didn't dampen the pleasures of science.

In one of my final years the school play was a version of the scene from *Three Men in a Boat* in which travelers marvel at a wonderful stuffed fish only to find when it falls that it's fake. Several plaster fish were needed. Mr. Moodey made an original and then cast several others using a box of wet sand as a mould for the plaster.

Some of the experiments I've described may belong to Form 4 or 5.

SHS didn't have an automatic bell system. Mr. Moodey had a large pocket watch that he usually placed on the desk. When the time was right he went out into the hall and pressed a button high on the doorframe to ring the school bells. It's a tribute to his highly organized mind that I don't remember his ever being more than a minute or two late.

I find myself puzzled. We had Mr. Iverson for something. Was it Mathematics or History? Perhaps Mr. Moodey had us only for Science. At any rate, I guess the conclusion is that Mr. Moodey made a stronger impression on me than Mr. Iverson who I remember as being rather dry and humourless. Once when he was pointing out something to me at my desk my mind wandered and I noticed the prominent veins on the back of his hand and wondered if my hands would ever be like that. (They're not.) Mr. Iverson obtained his Masters at McGill that year. My parents and I were at the ceremony. I'm not sure why.

The other new teacher who made a significant impact that year was Mr. Davies or Davis. I believe he had been in the British navy in World War Two. He was quite British, rather dapper, friendly, funny and a bit of an iconoclast. We were supposed to read *Pickwick Papers* that year. Mr. Davies scorned the idea. Instead he read us *The Thirty-Nine Steps* aloud and then together we read *Huntingtower* by John Buchan. As a treat when we were good he read us Bulldog Drummond stories aloud. His impact on me was two-fold. As soon as he told us that *Pickwick Papers* was unreadable I determined to read it–perhaps because I remembered Mr. Mayer's play. It took me a couple of years, but I finished it. And I loved Buchan. My parents were members of

the Mechanics Institute library on Atwater just south of Saint Catherines. I went with them in the evening and was allowed to take out books on their card. I read most of Buchan and quite a bit of Dickens too. *Pickwick Papers* and *The Thirty-Nine Steps* are both on what I call my desert island shelf beside my bed. I'll never read *Pickwick Papers* from cover to cover again, but certain passages remain among the favourite readings that I turn to for refreshment when I feel low. Dickens was not altogether new to me. When I was small if I was sick in bed my mother read me *her* favourite parts of *David Copperfield*.

We begged Mr. Davies to read. One day when he was a little late for class one of us (probably Charlie Colby) drew a steam shovel on the board with "Bulldog Drummond" or "Sapper" (the author) printed on its arm. Mr. Davies erased the drawing and made it quite clear that *he* would let us know when we could have our treat. We also pestered him to let us know how *The Thirty-Nine Steps* ended. Naturally he refused to tell us ahead of time, but in an effort to silence us he went so far as to tell us that the final word in the novel was "khaki." I can't take credit for remembering the actual word from that day. I've re-read the book several times.

There aren't many better things a parent or a teacher can do than lead a youngster to enjoy reading. My mother started the process, but I owe Mr. Mayer, Mr. Davies and Mr. Speirs a debt for enriching my inner life immeasurably.

In the second half of the year we read *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. I enjoyed the novel so much I re-read it before the summer term final exams convincing myself that I was making a huge sacrifice of leisure time in order to review. The week before exams I came home feeling seedy and developed a rash. I had measles and missed the exams. I was torn between feelings of thwarted virtue and sheer delight. The previous year chickenpox and scarlet fever had darkened my summer holidays. The gods are just.

Mr. Perkins taught us a subject. After a heavy snowfall up to six of us could get out of his class in order to shovel the rink. We ganged three scrapers together to push the snow into piles by the gaps in the chain link fence above the boards. There someone would heave the snow through into the huge piles that accumulated over the edge of the vacant lot below the school property. Sometimes boys made tunnels in these piles. My mother made me promise never to crawl through the tunnels. I think I obeyed her though the temptation was great.

Mr. Davies must have taught us Geography because I remember one of his assignments. We made relief maps of various parts of the world out of a paste of flour and water. These had to be painted appropriately according to elevation. My map was of Australia. I used the cardboard that came in my father's shirts from the laundry as a backing. I was proud of the result. Mr. Davies criticized my map (quite justly) for making Western Australia dip too far towards the Antarctic. Thinking fast, I told him I must have placed it upright to dry overnight and that part of the map had sagged. He gave me a funny look but he said nothing. It doubtless occurred to him as it does to me now that the failure of the rest of the map to subside at least a little bit made my explanation suspicious.

Mme. Gyger taught us French. She always looked tired. As an adult I'm not proud of the way we treated her, but at the time we took great delight in mischief in her class. In my own teaching career I've run into several teachers like her who simply refuse to discipline the students they teach, perhaps because of their own generosity of nature or a belief, all evidence to the contrary, in the goodness of humankind–even the pre-adolescent part of it. They suffer every day but they don't change their approach. Most of them switch careers. Mme. Gyger stayed bravely on.

We put chalk in the grooves of the blackboard eraser so that it wouldn't erase. We drilled out the ends of pieces of chalk and filled them with transparent glue so they wouldn't write. We attached a thread to a piece of chalk on the blackboard ledge. The thread went over a thumbtack at the top of the board and over several more tacks around the classroom to John Savage's desk by the west wall of the room. It worked like a charm. As Mme. Gyger talked to us she reached behind her for the chalk. It climbed the board and hung under the tack. Puzzled, Madame felt for it then searched the ledge. It never occurred to her to look upwards. She had to go to the next room to get another piece. You would have thought that our delighted expressions and stifled giggles would have made her suspicious. Some people are just too nice to be teachers. We persuaded Savage to hide behind a large map made of stiff cardboard that stood across the corner of the room. Despite the fact that the map wobbled several times during the class and John excited us by occasionally sticking his head up, Mme. Gyger never noticed anything. After thirteen years of school French I'm not bilingual. I have no one to blame but myself.

More random events outside the classroom

Once the gym/ auditorium/ lunch hall opened we had assembly every morning at 8:45. We usually sat on the floor, but if there was a speaker, benches and chairs were provided. I can't help but wonder why this window-dressing was important to the school. In spite of having attended assembly every day for seven years I can't remember the agenda. A boy from the senior class read a lesson from the Bible. To do this he had come early to school and fetch a heavy homemade lectern from the A Form classroom and place it on a table at the west end of the hall. After assembly was over he had to take it back again. The big Bible was kept inside the lectern. We probably recited the Lord's Prayer. Did we have a hymn every day? I think so. We had tiny blue hymnbooks that fit in our jacket pockets. The hymns were in two columns in small print. Mr. Phillips played the upright piano in the corner of the gym. His lace-up shoes had six eyelets on each side of the opening. Mine had only four. I hoped I would have grown-up shoes like that someday. Some of the old hymns were fun to sing and we belted them out: "Jerusalem," "To be a pilgrim" and "Onward Christian Soldiers."

The Duke of Buccleuch (pronounced Buckl*ew*; I may have the spelling wrong) was a guest speaker. I don't recollect what he said; his being a real live duke was enough to make me remember him. Bell Telephone had a show that they must have done for schools. They had switchboard models and a huge mock-up of the mechanism behind the dial of a phone cut away to show how a number was reached. Someone who had traveled widely in Africa and elsewhere came and among other things played what used to be called a Jew's Harp. He made us laugh with his antics. A group of black musicians performed for us. The pianist was blind. I was awed by the way he made the old piano jump.

Remembrance Day was always honoured with a special assembly. The lesson was that wonderful passage from Ecclesiasticus: "Let us now praise famous men and our fathers that begat us. . . ." There was the moment of silence and senior boys read aloud the names of old boys who had died in the World War Two. The school was too young to have had participants in World War One. One of these Remembrance Day assemblies must have gone on for a long time; perhaps I had skipped breakfast that day. I felt a strange feeling creeping over me. A fog filled the room. I managed to get out of the gym. I must have gone down to the locker room before I passed out because that's where someone, perhaps Mrs. Howis, revived me with the old Victorian standby, smelling salts. The caustic odour brought me back to life instantly. I doubt

that anyone in the school knew anything about first aid. How there happened to be a bottle of smelling salts so readily available is anybody's guess. Other than that experience I've never heard the phrase used outside Victorian novels.

In my final year there was a rash of petty thefts. Mr. Speirs delivered a powerful lecture to the school. The lecture occurred on a day when it was my turn to read the lesson so I was sitting at the front of assembly facing the school. Mr. Speirs was a commanding presence and on this morning he was justifiably angry. I was not the thief but by the time the diatribe was finished I felt riddled with guilt. One of the points he made was that the value of the item stolen was irrelevant. Whether you stole a pencil or a Cadillac you were a thief. What boy hasn't "borrowed" a pencil and forgotten to return it? Surely the whole school was staring at me. I swallowed hard, looked out the south windows past Mr. Speirs' head and tried to think of other things.

At recess "Frozen" Tag was popular. Having two boys "it" and five boys chased was the best proportion. The last boys down to touch a certain board at the far side of the rink were "it" for the first game. I didn't mind being "it" if I was with one of the more athletic boys like Tim Peters. If I was with another non-athlete like myself we might be "it" for the whole break. That was no fun at all. Some of us formed pacts to try to get certain combinations so that we could have a long free time. Our pre-break liaisons could get complex to the point of being baroque.

At some point I got into a fight with Toby Rankin. This was injudicious. Toby was a small boy but one of the school athletes. A crowd of delighted spectators formed, all of them rooting for Toby. Suddenly he broke off the fight and burst into tears. Through his tears he said he had something called a mastoid and had had an operation. I must have made contact with his ear. I'm still not sure what the medical problem was. I hadn't meant to hurt him. My struggles were always defensive. I didn't start fights for the simple reason that I knew I wouldn't win. The crowd's reaction upset me. If Toby had reduced me to tears the other boys would have congratulated him and left me sniveling in a corner by myself. Now they clustered around him sympathetically and I was left out again. Where were the fruits of victory?

"Stand-o" was a popular game. It was a variation of Wall Ball; I don't remember the exact rules–in fact, my memory may be combining two games. Once a player accumulated a certain number of negative points he had to bend over against the wall under the chestnut tree while all the other players in the game took turns throwing the tennis ball as hard as possible at his backside until his deficit was erased. One day Mr. Davies blew the whistle early for the end of recess and called us over to the boards. He told us he had no objection to the game, but advised us to keep our legs together if we didn't want to get badly hurt. The advice was good but occasioned fits of giggling. Many years later the boys at Crescent School developed a similar game they played in the squash courts. I felt the need to speak to the boys in assembly. Times had changed and the boys were older. I made my remarks in a tone of deep mock seriousness and got a delighted reaction once the school realized exactly where I was going with my advice. It's a pity the spoken word can't use footnotes. I thought fondly of Mr. Davies as I spoke.

Tennis balls were always flying around the rink. One day I stepped into the path of one and took it in the eye. I felt dizzy when I got back the class. Youngsters love a crisis. When the teacher arrived the class erupted into explanations.

"Sir, Pedoe got a tennis ball in the eye."

"I think he's going to faint, Sir."

"Someone threw it really hard, Sir."

"He looks a funny colour."

I was sent home in a taxi. I reclined in the back seat making the most of the occasion. By the time I arrived home I was feeling fine. I don't think I even developed a black eye.

Playing basketball at the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association I took an elbow in the eye. That particular contact didn't seem to bother me but I developed a Technicolor shiner that was the envy of the class.

Two events occurred every year at the MAAA. First, the choir sang at a children's Christmas party. The pleasure in this was staying for the rest of the entertainment and the refreshments. One of the entertainers was a sketch artist who did rapid caricatures on big pieces of paper. I thought he was brilliant until I saw one of his discarded sketches. He drew faint outlines ahead of time and just followed them for the crowd.

The other event at the MAAA was the annual school swimming meet. As must be obvious by now I wasn't then and am not now an athlete. But in my summer holidays with my grandmother in Toronto I had swimming lessons from a professional coach. My technique was good. In my final year I placed second to Tim Peters in the overall standing. The little cup I won on sports day was my proudest possession. It didn't even have my name on it. Eventually the silver finish wore off and the plastic base cracked. Still, it had pride of place in my room for years. At what point it disappeared I don't know. I wish I still had it. Both UCC and Crescent School, the schools with which I have been associated the longest, are much more generous in handing out awards than Selwyn House was. As a parent, an educator and a recipient I prefer their philosophy.

Lunch was held in the gym. The smallest boys sat on the left at Mrs. Howis' table. The senior school worked its way up the right side of the room. The Graduating class or prefects sat at a head table with Mr. Speirs. We had one glass of milk each and as much water as we wanted. Our first glass of water in the same glass was always cloudy. My favourite meal was a sort of coarse meat (probably pork) in brown gravy. My least favourite was shepherds' pie. I liked shepherds' pie at home but there was something about the taste or texture of the school version that bothered me.

We liked to play a game that involved holding a spoon or fork at the edge of the table and pretending to bend it while it actually slipped through our hands. The idea was to make someone who didn't know the trick do it "for real" and get into trouble or to have the teacher tell us to stop and then to show that we hadn't bent the spoon. Everyone knew the trick and I don't remember any teacher ever being fooled but we kept trying anyway.

When I came home every day Mom would ask, "What did you have for lunch?" My invariable answer was, "Some kind of meat."

In fourth form we became table monitors or some similar title. We sat at the foot of the table, collected new bowls or platters, stacked and removed soiled dishes and at the most junior tables, helped the boys with their food. We changed tables each week, rotating around the room. Our job often took us into the pantry under the stairs in the old house. This room was equipped with a rope-operated dumb water that connected with the kitchen in the basement. Helping out in this inner sanctum was fun.

I remember one gym display. We practiced routines in class with Mr. Mingie. Unlike Mr. Perkins he spotted the boys as they did their routines. I gave him a bit of a shock. With several of the box-horse exercises the talented boys did one exercise while the rest of us did another. The most exciting was a jump off the springboard to land on the hands near the end of the box and flip off the end. Instead of this exercise I was supposed to jump onto the horse, run along it and jump off. I *knew* I could do the flip. I felt that if I asked permission I might be laughed at or

refused. On one of the runs I gathered my courage and without telling anyone I did the flip. It was exhilarating. Mr. Mingie was angry for a minute or two. He must have had a flash of panic as I shot past him, but to his credit he let me continue to do the vault.

I was put in charge of the crew that changed the equipment at the end of each routine. I had a list of mats, horses and bars and diagrams of their placement. I was proud of having the responsibility and of the speed and accuracy with which we performed. We did our duty flawlessly but I have to admit I spent part of the performance hanging upside down from the parallel bars in the corner. Everything looked much brighter that way.

Locations for sports were always a problem when the school was on Redpath Street. We went up the mountain for soccer and softball during my early years at the school. Later we went to the Westmount Athletic Grounds for soccer. There were three fields there: two small and one large, so games were divided into three periods as in hockey and the players rotated around the fields. I preferred being on the smaller fields. These backed on the CPR main line. I was usually a substitute and spent my time on the sidelines. On the smaller fields I hung on the chain link fence watching the high-stepping steam engines whisking their trains to Ottawa or Toronto. Time passed more quickly there than on the large field.

Games against other schools must have been played because I remember a cheer we used:

1,2,3,4–who are we for?
Selwyn House! Selwyn House!
Rah! Rah! Rah!
5,6,7,8–who do we appreciate?
Selwyn House! Selwyn House!
Rah! Rah! Rah!

I don't think we had much interest in the games. I can remember neither opponents nor scores, but the cheers gave us something to do. We could be loud and obnoxious in a quasi-legal way.

In Form 3 I finally made a soccer team. Through nobody's fault, because I was a year younger than most of my classmates, it was the "under 11" team. My friends all played on the "under 12." We played a game at LCC on a sunny afternoon. I felt emancipated and enjoyed the freedom of running and the smell of the grass. If I'm not mistaken, Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip arrived in town that night for a state visit. We had gone to LCC in parents' cars and didn't get home until after dark because of various detours. I think we went by train to play a Saturday game at Bishops, too.

We must have continued to play some of our games up on the Mountain because I remember certain moments that I know didn't occur when I was only five or six years old. I bought my first soft drink in the little shop in one of the castle-like apartment buildings on Côte des Neiges across from the steps that led up to the woods and the fields. I had to insert a coin and extract a bottle from a machine where the bottles hung by their necks immersed in icy water in a sort of iron maze. The coin was borrowed.

As we went down through the woods one afternoon, David Terroux and I came upon a forest fire. It was probably just a controlled burn to get rid of weeds, but we spent an exciting time trying to extinguish it. In the process I put down my school bag with all my textbooks and homework books in it. I couldn't find it. Hopelessly late I ran home down Atwater. Already in trouble, I told my parents my bag had been stolen–which might, I suppose, have been true.

We were bused down Atwater Street to Verdun Arena to play hockey. To be more accurate I should say that some boys were bused to play hockey; I was bused to sit in the stands. I don't

recollect ever setting foot on the ice. The unsupervised hours as a spectator got me into trouble twice. David Terroux and I were running around the girders at the top of the stands. One of the ushers or maintenance men grabbed us, put us outside the front doors and told us not to return. We were too timid to say or do anything so we stood out there for an hour or so watching our breath as the sun dropped in the sky. Finally the rest of the boys came out and we all boarded the buses. We didn't get frostbite, but we were bloody cold by the end of the afternoon. On the second occasion several of us were waiting on a bus for the boys who had played to change out of their skates and join us. I asked the driver if we could have the bus lights on so that we could read. He refused. I must have said something derogatory, because he reported me and another boy to the one of the teachers. The other boy and I were told to report to Mr. Speirs in the morning. I was a little older now and better at dealing with tricky situations. The other boy was from a lower grade. When we were standing side by side on the carpet in front Mr. Speirs' desk and he asked what had happened, I stepped forward and took full responsibility for the incident giving no excuses. Mr. Speirs let us off with a warning.

Though I never made a hockey team I must have had a tryout at some point, because I remember sitting on the players' bench at the Forum. The school didn't regularly play there, so I don't know what produced this bonanza. It pains me to admit that on the few occasions as an adult when I've found myself in the company of jocks who were boasting of their exploits I usually managed to drop into the conversation some such statement as, "Of course, when I was a boy I played hockey at the Forum, you know." I may have failed to mention that it was only once and I only remember sitting on the bench. I'm afraid I padded my resumé.

When I entered the senior school, or perhaps in Form 2, I switched from softball to cricket in the summer term. We walked up Redpath, which in those days was a dead-end street, climbed the stairs to Pine Avenue and walked up by the Royal Victoria Hospital and across the top of Molson Stadium. I liked cricket. I was hardly a star, but I had good hands in the field and by practicing for hours at home learned to bowl fairly effectively. I actually made the teams. Unfortunately cricket was hardly a common sport among Quebec schools. I only got to play in two games, one against Sedbergh and one in my final year against an assortment of fathers, one of whom I bowled cleanly. I dreamed of getting my "colours" but these were handed out only to the outstanding few so I had to be content with being just a player.

There was always plenty of spare time while the other team was in the field. We played French Cricket and watched young men practise throwing the javelin on the field below us to the east.

I normally took the bus home from cricket practice, but one day I forgot my money or my tickets. It was a long, hot walk. I've always been a fast walker, but this day I trudged past the ponderous mansions on Sherbrooke Street feeling very sorry for myself.

The fact has nothing to do with Selwyn House, but MTC children's tickets (dark blue) were seven for 25¢; Adult tickets (beige) were three or four for 25¢.

We often had excursions outside the school. One year when the cricket or soccer teams were going to play Sedbergh the school rented a moth-eaten private railway coach tacked on the end of the Ottawa train. The cub and scout packs traveled with the teams and went into the woods to a large domed rock for a picnic and, presumably, some lessons in woodcraft. A senior boy from Sedbergh showed a few of us his cabin in the woods and made his life at the school sound exciting. On the way back I mislaid my cub cap. I was still hunting for it when the train reached Westmount Station where I was to get off. I climbed down with that empty feeling that always accompanied my all-too-frequent losses. I was in trouble again. I stood on the platform in the

dark and watched the train begin to move. The teachers must have continued looking. Mr. Phillips shot out onto the rear platform of the car and spun an object back at me along the track. I shouted a thank you at his receding figure and scrambled along the ties to pick up the cap. The day was a happy one after all.

A local law dating from the fire of 1927 forbidding anyone under the age of sixteen going to the movies was still in effect, but by the 1950s new cinemas were being built to stringent standards. These cinemas could get special licences to allow children to see certain movies. Still, movies were rare treats. We were taken twice as a class to a new cinema some distance out Sherbrooke Street West, once to see *Julius Caesar* with Marlon Brando as Mark Antony and the second time to see *The Cruel Sea*. The images made a strong impression on me.

We went to see an exhibit of models of Leonardo da Vinci's inventions and to a rather odd enactment in a shallow indoor tank of how a destroyer could sink a submarine. The miniature ships were excellent but I was disappointed in the enactment. The commentator described what *should* have been happening in real life. There was a moment of excitement when the U-boat submerged. After that: disappointment. Needless to say, there were no depth charges, no torpedoes and no explosions. At the end of the program the "destroyed" submarine was sitting undamaged on the bottom of the tank ready to be retrieved for the next show.

I've mentioned the visit of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip to Montreal. An invitation was extended to the schoolchildren of the city to attend a reception at Molson Stadium one Saturday morning. We dressed in our best blazers and wore elaborately printed tags in our buttonholes. The stadium was packed. Our seats were high in the south stands near the west end. After a long time staring at the empty field we saw the limousine pull onto the track. Two tiny figures got out and waved, and I presume something was said. We stood and cheered mightily. Mom was an ardent IODE member and a royalist to the core. She must have told me what a wonderful opportunity I was being given. I found the experience exciting. Today I wouldn't cross the street to see the Queen and if the clerk in the post office offers me stamps with her picture on them I ask if there's anything else available. Sorry, Mom.

The big trip in our final year was a Saturday trip to Ottawa. We heard George Drew speak in the House of Commons and came away ardent Conservatives (not a great stretch), met the Postmaster General (Caxton? Paxton?) and ate in the Members' dining room ("some kind of meat"). I'm ashamed to say that, impressed with the crested silverware, I tucked a spoon up each sleeve and took them home as souvenirs. Oddly enough, when I told my mother some time later she made a show of mild horror, but I could tell she didn't mind. If I had robbed a candy store there would have been serious repercussions. My parents disliked the long-standing Liberal government. I think they were secretly glad to see the robbers robbed.

Part way through my time at the school the House System was introduced. Mr. Speirs expressed embarrassment that one of the Houses was named after him. Since there had been only four Headmasters, he said, the fourth House had to be Speirs House. I was in Lucas.

The year always ended with a sports day at Molson Stadium and a Prizegiving ceremony held in my final years at Moyse (?) Hall on the McGill University campus. My parents dutifully attended these functions but must have been as disappointed as I was that until my final year I never won anything. Once I thought I had come third in the sack race and signaled delightedly to my parents in the stands, but someone else's name was called, so I must have been mistaken. My parents refused to participate in the relay race for parents and their sons run on the infield. I begged them to run, "Just this once," but they were adamant. Oh well. I come by my lack of athleticism naturally; I probably would have been more disappointed if they *had* become

involved. On one occasion Dad went so far as to remove his jacket, but this involved also removing his braces because he didn't think it proper for a gentleman to be seen wearing them while coatless. He then took off his tie and turned that into a belt. By that time the race was over.

Tony Maxwell was a great runner. One sports day he showed me two corks he had brought with him. He said his grandfather had told him that gripping the corks would make him run faster. Privately I thought this unfair. Why would he want to run faster than he already did?

Oddly enough, the thing I remember best about sports day is the echo. The starter's pistol reverberated off some rocks at the northeast corner of the track. When prizes were presented from a table by the track on the north side of the field, the presenter's voice came from speakers above the pavilion at the west end. There was a noticeable gap between the speaker's faint words and the projected roar that wobbled across the grass. Speaking coherently must have been nearly impossible.

Form 4: 1952-53

Form 4 was a good year for me. I discovered Shakespeare and learned that I was good at public speaking.

Our class was reduced to eleven. The reason parents withdrew their sons had nothing to do with the quality of education. The problem was that every Selwyn boy would have to continue his education at another school. Many parents looked at boarding schools in Ontario and Quebec. What was the best time to start elsewhere? The school's own uncertainty was expressed in the fact that part way through my time there the school removed its sixth form. The question of my continuing education was discussed from time to time over my head at dinner. One night my parents came back from the theatre and told me they had had a conversation with the Matsons who had two sons at the school. Whatever was said, both the Matsons and my parents decided to stay on to the end.

My desk was beside the low window on the north side of the room. I had room to put things on the deep windowsill and I had a private view over the gravel courtyard to the Victorian mansion next door and its garden. There were often workmen making repairs, painting the woodwork of the house or gardening. I enjoyed this private world.

Each boy had shelf space in a recessed bookshelf on the door side of the room. To ask to fetch a book made a pleasant break in a long class. The class bottle of ink was kept there too. We were not allowed to use ballpoint pens. They were considered bad for our handwriting. "*Puis-je remplissez mon stylo, s'il vous plait*?" is one of the phrases I remember. It hasn't been much use to me over the years.

Mme. Gyger's problems continued. The big items that year were elastic bands that we placed over our rulers and shot across the classroom. Mme. Gyger still took no measures to stop us but not surprisingly she lost her temper frequently. Her favourite exclamation was, "*Vraiment*!" Charlie Chaffey adapted his protractor by poking a hole through it at the center point, putting a straightened paper clip through the hole and writing an escalating series of words like "warm" and "angry" in place of the degrees along the edges. At the top of the scale was *Vraiment*. When Madame became angry he held the protractor so we could see it and made us seethe with repressed laughter by making wild swings with the pointer. Our reaction to Madame's anger did not help her.

This must have been the year Mr. Phillips caned me. It didn't hurt at all. One afternoon when I was playing pick-up hockey on the school rink, a younger boy named Pilot spent a happy

hour pelting me with snowballs. I couldn't get at him because I was on skates. Every time I came over to the boards he ran away only to return a few minutes later fully armed. The next day I waited for him outside the school on Redpath Street and pushed his head into a snow bank. At that moment Mr. Phillips appeared. I was guilty of bullying. Even if I had been asked to explain my behaviour, schoolboy ethics would have forbidden me from implicating another student. Mr. Phillips was on his way home; he didn't want to go back into the school. He told me to report to him at an early hour in the morning for a caning. I wore seven pairs of underpants and between the layers placed two folded handkerchiefs over each cheek. I acted hurt and got away with my subterfuge. I desperately wanted to boast to someone (particularly Pilot who I assumed was gloating) that for once I had outsmarted the authorities, but I didn't dare. Call me petty. I may be sixty-three and a respectable grandparent but I'm enjoying telling the story of that caning and my little victory.

Mr. Moodey taught us Mathematics and Science. We had a complicated system of small exercise books we were supposed to use for each subject. The Mathematics ones were dark blue. One was for homework, one was for tests and we were to use one for copying perfect corrected solutions. Prone to careless mistakes and paranoid about having them discovered, every time I erred I ripped out the page and started again. It didn't take Mr. Moodey long to notice that my book was considerably thinner than everyone else's. He made an example of me in front of the class for destruction of property and told me that if I wanted scrap paper to play with, he would be pleased to supply it. As I recount this incident and place it with my other schoolboys sins and their punishments what surprises me is that nobody ever asked me *why* I did what I did. Fifty years ago schoolboys were always assumed to be guilty in motive as well as in deed. Some strange doctrine of pedagogical original sin governed adults' attitude to boys. In schools the pendulum appears to have swung as far as it can. Punish a child today and the parents leap to the defence of their innocent offspring and inquire what the teacher has done wrong.

I astonished Mr. Moodey by tying Charley Chaffey on my Christmas Geometry exam. I think my mark was a sky-scraping 98%. He needn't have worried. The mark was an aberration that was not repeated.

The highlight of the year–and the following year–was English with Mr. Speirs. Over two years we read *Julius Caesar*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth* (I think) and *Twelfth Night*. *Twelfth Night* was my favourite. I have seen it three times and own two videos of the play. Its blend of wit, melancholy, role-playing and strange attraction still enthralls. Mr. Speirs used a traditional Socratic approach. He read a short passage or had one of us read it, then he asked questions about its meaning or its mood or the character of the speaker. Academically I was ensconced solidly in the middle of the class, somewhere between fourth and sixth on most reports. The consensus among the teachers was that if I was intelligent I certainly wasn't demonstrating it, and that I had an infinite capacity for daydreaming and laziness. But here was a miracle. The words and phrases that most of the other boys seemed to find tangled and obscure were clear as daylight to me or at the worst clever riddles to unravel and to discuss. I loved the classes and the plays and always had my hand up with a good answer to Mr. Speirs' questions. I didn't improve my performance on tests or exams–and in those bad old days there was no mark for class participation or performance. But the classes were a delight to me; I dealt with reports on the principle that, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

We read a poem titled "The Passer-By" about a clipper ship. One of the boys referred to it as "The Passer Byer." I said that sounded like a window-shopper. Mr. Speirs praised me for my wit. I basked in the moment.

Mr. Speirs was a strong presence but never frightening. He was cheerful and upbeat in class and sprinkled the lessons with lively anecdotes. I remember two of them. When he was a boy in Scotland (I think it was Scotland) he lived near a railway bridge over a river. One of the rites of passage among his friends was a dare to walk along the girder or parapet beside the track while the express was passing a few inches away. He told this story as a cautionary tale, but made it far too exciting. Luckily there were no rail viaducts near where we lived. The second story came from his teaching days at LCC. In one of his classes he asked the boys to stand and read the essays they had done for homework the night before. One boy's essay was so good that Mr. Speirs asked him to read it again. The boy was compelled to make a confession. He hadn't done his homework; he'd made up the essay as he "read" it from a blank piece of paper. Mr. Speirs told the story with a sense of glee at the boy's inventiveness, but I'm afraid that the moral I drew from it was that if I was going to cheat, I should make sure that I built an appropriate level of incompetence into my work to avoid arousing suspicion.

What we learn and what we draw from the lesson so carefully taught us is often not what is intended. One of the pleasures of being a retired teacher is hearing from or talking to past students. It tickles me when they recount some story that I told years before in class, some event that has produced a resonance in their lives. I feel buoyed by the thought that maybe I have been faithful to the memory of the best teacher I ever had.

Other than the discovery of Shakespeare another event occurred in Form 4 that altered my life. Every year the graduating class took part in a public speaking competition. The finals were held in assembly. The fourth form had a practice competition. The winner joined the finalists in assembly. Everyone expected Charlie Chaffey to win. I spoke to the class about city traffic. Mr. Moodey was the judge. I can picture "Moo" sitting hunched on the windowsill at the back of the class delivering his comments. He sounded surprised and perhaps even disappointed, but he was fair man. I won. I was terrified when I addressed the school. I held my notes behind my back as I had been instructed and reduced them to a ball of damp mush while I talked. I didn't win–I didn't expect to, competing against the big boys, but I received good comments. Despite my inner turmoil I was told I presented a cool front to the school. I found the experience exhilarating. I've had ample opportunities to develop my skill and still enjoy public speaking. I became the opposite of most people. Meeting strangers up-close-and-personal makes me sweat, addressing an audience I feel perfectly at ease.

Either this year or next we competed in an essay competition sponsored by the Royal Empire Society. Several of us won Oxford dictionaries "for outstanding merit." I didn't need to remember the phrase. I still use the dictionary whenever my computer lets me down. It's on the shelf beside my desk. The Bank of Montreal sent piles of green and black dust jackets to the school every year for us to put on our books. Believe it or not my dictionary is still wearing the one I put on it with considerable pride over fifty years ago. Adults have no idea what a prize means to a child who seldom wins anything.

Mr. Davies taught us History and Geography. He introduced us to a new type of assignment called "Projects." These became the bane of my parental existence later in life, but as something new, they were exciting. I wrote on "A Visit to England" and illustrated it with pictures from travel brochures. I was particularly proud of the cover. I used blue Bristol board cut to size, made my own stencil and used it to paint a red map and bought stencils to make white letters. I fashioned a binding with paper, glue and a white shoelace. I still have the project . . . somewhere.

The library may have opened this year. I spent hours there after school. It was the year of the Coronation and Mrs. Warren with our help and contributions made an exquisite parade of toy

soldiers and carriages along the central table. For the first time in my life I did some writing for pleasure. Fourth form was a good year.

Form 5: 1953-54

Throughout our last year teachers kept telling us that we shouldn't get too used to being big fish in a little puddle because next year we would be very small fish in a much larger puddle. It was the sort of general advice that had very little value–like telling troops in the landing craft on D Day that they shouldn't get too comfortable because life was going to be worse on the beach. What's the point? Time passes. We had waited seven years to be the senior class. What twelve-year-old plans for the future or suppresses his feelings because the following year may be difficult?

Again I had a private window and enjoyed watching workmen shovel clouds of snow off the rooftops of the buildings below the school.

We had Mr. Moodey ("Moo" or "Moo Cow") for Math and Science. Our timetable scheduled a triple Math period on one of the days. Mr. Moodey told us at the beginning of the year that he knew this was a long class so when necessary he would give us a break in the middle. I kept waiting, but the break never came. Mr. Moodey could be amusing but he was intense and focused by nature; he probably never realized how time passed in our minds. One diversion he did offer us from time to time was a general knowledge test–not for marks, just for fun. I enjoyed these because my wide reading allowed me to do well.

It was probably Mr. Moodey's quizzes that inspired me many years later to develop a House competition called "Brains of Crescent." It was popular and certainly allowed some unlikely boys to become heroes for a day.

We had a new French teacher, Mr. Bury or Berry. This may have been the year we did the reader, *Emile et les Détectives*. It was an enjoyable tale about smart street children solving a crime. I was surprised to learn some years later that it was actually a German novel translated into French.

We tried to continue our bad habits from previous years, but Mr. Bury was young and determined. The battle lines were drawn. The only prank I remember is one we set up as a class ahead of time. The fire escape left from an enlarged window on the south side of our classroom. Our duty was to leave as soon as the alarm sounded and to stand on the landings to supervise the exit of all the boys from the upper floors. We decided that when we heard the bell halfway through a double French period we would pretend that we thought it was the fire alarm and rush down the escape. I was nearest the door so I had to lead the exodus. The bell sounded. I threw open the doors and charged out. David Terroux was next and improved the jest by knocking over my desk in his wild career. Half way down we had to acknowledge that there was no alarm. We came slowly back to the classroom, which had been reduced to a state of chaos by our exaggerated flight. We apologized profusely for our mistake, emphasizing our keenness to do our duty, but our expressions probably gave us away.

I'm not sure if I have the sequence of events right, but this episode may have been the occasion of my final caning. All I remember is Mr. Bury taking me into the storage cupboard beside the classroom. I begged him to choose some other form of punishment. His anger scared me. He was livid, the only teacher who ever struck me in anger. Either he hit me harder than anyone else or I felt the humiliation more because I was older. I smoldered with resentment against him for the rest of the year.

Mr. Phillips (known as "Flippo") taught us Latin. In addition to our grammar book we now had a reader, *Fabulae Faciles*. In spite of the title I found it anything but easy. The first story was about Perseus and Medusa. I managed that one but began to wallow soon afterwards. It wasn't until I got to real Roman authors–Horace, Caesar and Vergil–around grade 12 that I began to enjoy Latin. Mr. Phillips' classes were well organized but not inspiring.

We had Mr. Davies for History and Geography. We may have finally studied Canadian history from a book titled *Building the Canadian Nation*. I found it dull after the knights and sea battles and beheadings that had filled our earlier courses. Thank heaven for Pierre Berton. The only chapter I enjoyed was "Canada in the Horse and Buggy Age." I still enjoy social history.

This year instead of getting us to do individual projects he had us work as a group. Looking back, I see him as being the most innovative of our teachers. SHS was a *very* traditional school. He had us make a wall-size map of the world on three large sheets of art board. The class was divided into three groups, each responsible for one section. I think ours was the Europe/Africa section. We pushed the desks out of the way, Mr. Davies set the blank boards on the floor and penciled in the outlines of the continents to get us started. Our group must have fallen behind in the painting phase of the operation. I stayed behind one afternoon (voluntarily) to finish the yellow line that had to surround the land. I wasn't being a martyr; I enjoyed that sort of work and wanted to do it properly. Late in the afternoon I went out on the fire escape to take a break. It was a mild spring day and the snow was melting. Miss Gault left the school and walked down the street. She looked back and saw me. I wondered if I was going to get into trouble, but she smiled and gave me a friendly wave. I waved back and went inside to continue my artwork. For the final step I think we had to find actual samples of the products that came from various regions and glue them to the map. The masterpiece was completed for Parent-Teacher Night and looked rather fine on our wall. It was large, colourful and original. The only other decorations in the classroom were photographs of old school teams wearing solemn expressions and old-fashioned clothing.

Near the end of the year Mr. Davies invited the class to his apartment just below Molson Stadium for an evening of fun and games. One of the games was an experiment to determine whether or not mental telepathy existed. Three things–one of them was a little silver jug–were set on the floor. A boy left the room. An object was selected. The boy returned. We were supposed to sit in silence and think hard about the object we had selected. The boy was then to guess which object we had chosen. The first two or three boys–with Mr. Davies' approval–tried to perform the trick by setting up a code with another boy who would then give a secret signal to disclose the correct choice. None of these ruses worked. I was intrigued. I asked if I could try. Mr. Davies asked me who my partner was to be. I said I wanted to try alone. When I was called back into the room I sat on the floor in front of the objects, closed my eyes and tried to concentrate. Mr. Davies was sitting on a couch close behind me. I could sense him muttering some phrase under his breath but I couldn't distinguish the words. I clamped my teeth together and thought fiercely about each of the objects in turn. On my second time round I was sure it was the jug. I selected it. I was right. Coincidence? Perhaps. I was convinced that I had felt some connection with the thoughts in the room. I was pleased and subdued at the same time.

I met Mr. Davies twice later in life. Unfortunately, both were brief passings. He taught at TCS where I had brought a cricket team in one of my early years as a teacher. He came out on the field to say hello. Many years later we met crossing a street in Dartmouth, England, of all places. I had three of my young children with me so I couldn't stop long enough to say more than a surprised greeting. If I were to meet him again I'd like to tell him that I admired his

iconoclasm, his friendly nature and his innovative methods. I had several good teachers at Selwyn House; Mr. Davies was the one who was good *and* different.

I've left Mr. Speirs to the last. His English course was a continuation of Fourth Form, and if anything I enjoyed it more. The only dull classes were those we reluctantly devoted to a book called *Forging Ahead*, a primer on grammar, sentence structure and the like. I don't think Mr. Speirs liked those classes either. He came in once a week or once a fortnight and said, "I suppose we'd better forge ahead today. . . ." His manner was dour and I sensed that, like me, he would rather be enjoying *Twelfth Night*. Our novel for the year was *The Black Arrow* by Robert Louis Stevenson. I read some passages over and over again for sheer pleasure. It was exciting and romantic. I loved it. Not too long ago I found a copy in a second-hand bookstore. It's beside me now. I've picked it up again and again but I can't bring myself to read it. I'm afraid of disappointment. I don't want to tamper with remembered pleasure.

Every Friday our English homework was to write an essay on a choice of two or three topics, for example "A Streetcar Ride" or "An Incident at a Street Corner." I usually enjoyed these assignments and often wrote more than the requirements but sometimes I suffered from writers' block and made my mother's Saturday afternoon a misery with continual complaints that, "I can't think of anything to *say*." Grudgingly she gave me a few suggestions all of which I rejected as being no good, but used anyway when my brain stayed empty. I have five children, all of whom have had to write essays. Having a good memory of my childhood has improved my parenting skills–I hope.

The poetry we studied, like most of the history and Geography, was British. It was heavy on the Romantics and the Victorians. Not that I minded at the time. I quite enjoyed some of the poems and I still remember some fragments of the memory work we were set. Mr. Speirs taught us the two basic forms of sonnet. I was intrigued by the rigid pattern and wrote a sonnet (just to see if I could) about the coronation. It began, "O'er London Town dark mystic clouds are forming." I submitted it to the school yearbook, and won the poetry prize. Mr. Speirs gave me a sort of inverted compliment on the poem. He stopped me on the locker room stairs one afternoon and asked me if I had written it myself or copied it from somewhere. It was original. Writing sonnets became a kind of trick I could do. When I taught poetry and asked the students to write a sonnet I silenced their protests by getting them to give me four common words to use as rhymes ("orange" was forbidden). I then wrote a sonnet at normal writing speed on the board using the words. The sonnet was always lousy but the format was correct. I also wrote a sonnet to one of my girlfriends at university with remarkable results. Thank you, Mr. Speirs.

All ten member of the senior class (Toby Rankin left after fourth form) were automatically members of a debating club that met on Friday afternoons at boys' homes or occasionally in the Headmaster's office. Going into the office and sitting on the sofa over which I had bent on two previous occasions was a bit daunting at first, but these afternoons in the gathering twilight were convivial and stimulating. Mr. Speirs may have been a fine Headmaster but he was a teacher first and always. Each year's club was named for a letter of the Greek alphabet. Ours was Iota. As well as debating and speaking on various subjects we had a magnified version of Mr. Moodey's general knowledge quizzes. One of the questions was, "Who invented eye-glasses?" I put up my hand and said, "Benjamin Franklin." Mr. Speirs' reaction says something about what makes a good teacher. First of all the answer is wrong. Mr. Speirs told me so and gave the correct name (which I forget). Then he went on to praise me for a good guess since Franklin *is* credited with inventing bifocals. I doubt I analyzed what happened at the time; I just knew that in spite of giving a wrong answer I felt good about myself. But it so happens (as by now you know) that I

became a teacher. For whatever reason, one of my guiding principles was to try to find something to praise in any answer or opinion that a student was brave enough to volunteer in class. Whether my flaws overshadowed my good points my students have to judge. My point is that a good teacher's influence lasts beyond a single generation.

I made the Senior Soccer Team! I was only that extraneous functionary known as "Twelfth Man" but I got be in the team picture and I got to play the final five minutes of the final game. It didn't matter. I made the team.

All ten of us were acting prefects from the start of the year. As the year progressed if our work merited it we would be made full prefects a few at a time. Tony Maxwell, Tim Peters and I were the first ones to make the grade. We were given a small lapel pin in assembly. At that point I had hopes that I might be Head Prefect. I don't think it was very likely even under the best of circumstances, but fate intervened and made it impossible.

One afternoon at the end of a game of pick-up hockey on the rink, Rodney Tait and I found that jousting with hockey sticks had an appeal. We weren't fighting in earnest–just trying to look like the heroes of yore. The next afternoon we continued our practice in the junior locker room after everyone else had gone. Mr. Moodey walked in to find us in mid-duel. He was on his way to the staff meeting where the Head Prefect was to be determined. He gave us a sour look and said, "I'll have to tell them what you were doing." That was that. Tim Peters was Head Prefect and Tony Assistant Head Prefect. Oh well.

Prefects could give boys impositions (usually the writing of lines such as "I must not do such-and-such," I think) by filling the details in a book and getting a teacher to initial the punishment. I gave the first imposition of the year and was the heaviest user of the book, I'm afraid. The first taste of power is hard to resist. In my defence, when I became Head Prefect of one of the boarding houses at UCC, I put a stop to the rather brutal hazing of new boys by the prefects that had terrorized my first year at the school. I hope in life one gets more credit for endings than one does for beginnings.

All ten of us took turns reading the scripture lesson at assembly. I enjoyed this and on the first two rotations won the house points for reading best. I always practiced at home in front of my parents but I must have become rather cocky. The third lesson I had to read was one in which Christ talks about the foolishness of putting new wine in old bottles (Matthew 9: 14-17; I looked it up). I failed to notice as I read that I reversed some of the frequent repetitions of "old" and "new." Several sharp-eared teachers criticized me afterwards and I won nothing that fortnight. I was more careful in subsequent readings. A later lesson was one in which there was a long tangle of Hebrew names, none of which I knew how to pronounce. My parents suggested I phone Canon Latimer, our rector at St. James the Apostle. I felt a little uncomfortable making the call, but he was probably quite pleased to be asked and patiently sounded out the words for me. I hope I won the points that time.

The play in our final year was an historical drama called *Campbell of Kilmohr*. For one of the few times in my childhood acting career I got to play a man (in those days the women's parts were played by boys). We went downtown with Mr. Speirs one Saturday morning to a wonderful theatrical store to get our costumes. As a captain in the British army I wore the full scarlet uniform and, to my delight, carried a sword. At the end of the play a character is led offstage to be executed by firing squad. In the wings I was to give the commands. For the actual gunshot we were to use a starter's pistol. Here I must trespass on one of the late Mr. Moodey's excellent "Moo's Memories" in the alumni magazine. I've forgotten the context, but he commented on the loudness of the gunshot, which was fierce enough for him to remember many years later and

which apparently nearly gave the older members of the audience heart attacks. I can explain why. David Terroux played one of the soldiers under my command. We argued all through rehearsals about who should have the pleasure of firing the gun. David said–quite properly–that in a real situation I, as the officer, would give the order; he, as the soldier, would fire the gun. My argument was simpler, if less cogent. I outranked him; I would fire the gun. One of the teachers must have become fed up with our bickering. He produced a second starter's pistol. The reason for the earth-shaking bang was that there were *two* guns, not one–and we fired them in perfect unison.

The year ended well. I stood fifth in a class of ten but to everyone's surprise I won a major scholarship to UCC. One of the three papers was a general knowledge exam; I think I scored well on that. To nobody's surprise Charlie Chaffey won a similar scholarship to TCS. At the Prizegiving I was presented with the poetry prize and a medal with an engraving of a beehive on it. It was donated by one of the banks and signified second place for neatness and thrift. I wonder how they decided that. Oh well. At last my parents got to see me climb the steps to receive an award–two awards.

After our final Prizegiving on the McGill campus there must have been a reception back at the school. Our Selwyn House days were over but Mr. Moodey had a final treat for us. He gathered the class together and asked if we would like to see inside the cupola or widow's walk that crowned the old house. He unlocked the door and we climbed the creaking stairs. The room appeared to be filled with junk, there was no light and we couldn't see much. Still, we stood there gratified. We were in the last forbidden place. It was time to leave.

Well, there you have it. Eight event-filled years at a school that I can't help feeling was something of an anachronism. Yet its eccentricity was, I think, also its strength. Reading my chronicle I fear I may sometimes have emphasized the negative. I want to make myself clear at the end. Despite the bad days my Selwyn House experience could not have been more positive. Miss Snead's rectitude, Mrs. Markland's clarity, Mr. Mayer's kindness, Mr. Moodey's focus, Mr. Davies' iconoclasm, Mr. Speirs' delight in words and, yes, Mme. Gyger's tolerance all set me examples that formed me as well as my raw material would allow. Fragments of these men and women have been part of all the best moments of my life. Their peculiar natures did more for me than a bushel of dull, competent teachers could have. I was a teacher myself for thirty-seven years. I watched the good, the bad and the ugly try to teach; I have no idea what qualities make a good teacher, a *really* good teacher. All I know is that I'm glad the breeze that long-ago morning drove the smell of horse manure into my mother's nostrils and wafted me up Redpath Street.

How much of my account is accurate? To my inner eye, all of it. We all have odd talents. One of mine is an encyclopedic memory of my childhood going back to my second birthday. Still, to silence the skeptics, perhaps I should take my cue from the various polls when they predict elections: Allow for a variance of a few percentage points either way.

Putting these memories in print has brought back hundreds of others. Mischief with Tony Maxwell on Dorval Island. Tim Peters and his brother role-playing endless games of ball hockey in the lane behind their house. An afternoon at Rodney Tait's home on the south side of the river playing with his electric trains. The grand piano and the clothes-drying rack on pulleys in Charley Chaffey's apartment. Bicycle rides to watch trains at Westmount Station. A brief fashion for sky-blue ink. The year we made parachutes out of handkerchiefs. Water bombs, moron jokes, bubble-gum cards and fortune-telling devices made out of folded paper. On and on. I keep

wanting to go back to add a detail that some other event brings to mind. I have to stop somewhere.

The process has been like the sound of the boys coming in from recess and climbing the stairs to their classrooms. For a few moments the whole school is on the stairs. The noise is deafening. One by one the memories finish the climb to my consciousness. At last only a few stragglers are left. As the final images move up flight by flight the sound diminishes. One by one the classroom doors close. Another memory starts up. I can hear his steps. He's late. The school is never silent.